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ABSTRACT

Designed to help poorly prepared students perform better in college and to help prepared students perform at higher levels, this paper presents a series of specific suggestions for students regarding study activities, course choice, thinking behavior, and time allocation. The suggestions include the following: (1) eliminate diversions during study such as television and radio; (2) interview other students to identify interesting courses and be willing to change courses; (3) learn to review before and after class; (4) try to work at least a little bit each day; (5) try to avoid the habit of cramming for exams; (6) paraphrase what you learn, repeating it in your own words and relating it to what you understand to be the objectives of the course; (7) ask questions; (8) develop your own system of shorthand and review your notes; (9) if possible, study in the room in which a test will be taken; (10) make use of technology such as tape recorders; (11) study in the morning rather than late at night; (12) if you have to miss class, ask a friend to take notes; (13) don't miss finals even if you think you may be failing; (14) record important notes on index cards for reviewing; (15) make use of the tutoring center if you are having specific problems; (16) eat well, avoiding skipped meals and junk food; (17) know your limits and avoid over extending yourself academically; (18) remember the five W's when studying --who, what, where, when and why; (19) skim material before reading it; (20) avoid hedonistic indulgences; and (21) develop memory skills such as the use of mnemonic devices and memory tricks to retain information. (PAA)

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HOW TO LEARN MORE IN LESS TIME

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Running head: HOW TO LEARN MORE

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College freshmen face a great many new challenges - they have more freedom, more independence, more books, more classes, more intramurals, and a greater social life. At the same time, they are confronted with thicker textbooks, longer tests, more difficult material, and more temptations in terms of parties and other diversions. The following suggestions may help poorly prepared students do better in college and will help good students do even better, and learn more in less time with less aggravation and frustration.

1. Attention - students must pay attention more than ever before. Although we don't teach classes in "how to pay attention," we presume that students have learned this skill. Not so. It is a skill which must be developed and students need to work on it daily.

2. Focus - students must rid themselves of diversions - T.V., radio, etc., and concentrate on the task at hand. One hour of studying with 100% attention is worth two hours of studying with only 50% attention and concentration. In class also, students must intensely focus on the material to be learned (not on the girl in the next aisle).

3. Interest - students must try to have an interest in what they are learning. If you are not interested in the subject matter, or find the professor boring, you may want to consider enrolling in another course. Check with other students (and instructors) to see what courses they find interesting. Try to find something interesting in each course. Work at finding something of interest in

each course.

4. Motivation - students must want to do well. Some people simply float through their high school years, in college it is somewhat of a different ball game. There is more competition for grades and there are better students. People need to realize that more effort must be expended in college. Students must desire good grades and want to achieve and succeed.

5. Review - there are three aspects to review. One is review before class, another is review after class, and last, review as much as possible at all other times.

6. Throw yourself into your studies and classes each day, and every day in class. Invest your mental energy and intensity.

7. Do a little every day. Don't procrastinate. Don't wait until the night before the exam or the week before the term paper is due.

8. Don't cram. Many students try to study seven or eight hours the night before a test. This is not only ineffective in the short run it is also bad in the long run. For many students it also creates a lot of anxiety about the pending test. Cramming may work in your freshman year, but as you get older, it becomes less effective and the material that you forget due to cramming is now not available to you in your senior year (sometimes necessitating review).

9. Use time wisely. Many students complain they don't have time to study. Yet, they waste a lot of time before class, after class

and between classes. Also, take a look at how much time you spend watching soap operas or "Gilligan's Island." This is time wasted. Don't waste a lot of time at the movies or video games. Don't waste a lot of time "hacking."

10. Actively process information - mentally try to learn new material by doing some of the following: (a) paraphrase what you have learned - say it in your own words, (b) summarize what you have just heard or learned in your mind, (c) relate what you have learned to the objectives of the class - either as stated in the book or by the professor; relate what you have learned to past material you have learned, (d) study pictures, charts and graphs in the books, they are there for a purpose, (e) review the summaries at the end of each chapter, if there aren't any - make your own, (f) underline only what is important - focus on the key ideas, dates, places, people and things - be judicious; also look up words that you may not understand, part of learning to succeed is simply learning the language of the new course, each course seems to have its' own language - anthropology, soicology and psychology have key terms that need to be learned to get the hang of the course, (g) use study guides if they are available, if not, develop your own method of studying that seems to work for you, (h) get an example of material that you do not understand, (i) don't be afraid to ask questions, chances are there are others who don't understand.

11. In terms of note taking: (a) take down only the main points, (b) develop your own shorthand, (c) take copious notes of materials

put on the board, (d) review your notes - if you are not doing well, review a friend's notes to see what he or she is getting that you are not, (e) some colleges have note taking seminars - take advantage of these opportunities, (f) work at organizing both your notes and your thoughts.

12. If possible, study in the room in which you will take the test.

13. If possible, study in the same place at the same time, every day.

14. Keep subjects separate - use a different notebook for each subject, or at the very least, use a separate section for each subject.

15. Keep organized. Put handouts in a folder or file for later review.

16. Use technology! If the professor is going too fast for you - tape him or her on a cassette player, then listen to the tape when you are riding in your car, when you are out jogging, or in your dorm room.

17. Set up a study schedule and stick to it, include Saturday and Sunday.

18. Rise early, and don't stay up too late to study. There is a point of diminishing returns when the body is simply too tired to learn any more - better to rise early and study before class than to burn the midnight oil.

19. Don't indulge in weekend parties and Friday to Monday

drinking binges. The loss of sleep and the alcohol affects what you have learned the previous week.

20. Don't cut class. If you feel you must cut class, ask a friend to take notes for you and review their notes. However, it has been found that notes are a very poor substitute for actually being there. What your friend feels is important may not be important. Besides, what if your friend takes poor notes or decides to cut class themselves?

21. Show up for finals! Many students fail classes not because they are dumb or stupid, but they either: (a) simply forget to take the final or, (b) feel that they have failed already and that the final won't make a difference. There is a difference between a "D" and a "C" and a "D" and an "F." Every point counts toward your G.P.A. - often final exams are somewhat easier than tests during the semester.

22. Use index cards to review very important formulas, notes, dates, people and other important terms.

23. Review these index cards whenever possible - during lunch, just before retiring, first thing in the morning, while having breakfast.

24. If you are doing poorly - get help from the tutoring center or from someone who has taken the course before. The professor may have a graduate student who can assist.

25. Eat properly - too many college students skip breakfast and show up tired for their 8 a.m. class. Many students eat junk food

for lunch then are tired when their 3 p.m. class rolls around. You simply cannot live on coffee and a cigarette. Three well-balanced meals are imperative for studying and learning. If you are anemic, buy some multiple vitamins.

26. Know thyself. Don't take 18 hours if you are a weak student. Don't over extend yourself by signing up for intramurals and 15 hours in addition to your part-time job at McDonalds. You may be able to do it at the beginning of the semester, but it catches up with you at term paper time and finals week.

27. Remember the five "W's" when studying/reviewing - who, what, when, where, and why.

28. It is important to work hard for the first test for several reasons. First, many instructors intentionally make their first test easier. Secondly, it is somewhat depressing to do poorly and have to worry all semester about off-setting that initial poor grade. There is an old saying: "Well begun, half done."

29. Work on your weaknesses - if your math skills are weak, before taking those required courses, get some remedial help. If your writing is poor, get some help from the English Department, or take a remedial or developmental writing course. Turn the paper in early and let the professor read a rough draft. Have a friend proof read your first draft for typographical errors, syntax problems and missing words.

30. Find out the type of test the instructor gives - is it essay, multiple choice, true/false, fill in the blank? Being

prepared for the test involves more than just studying, learn what type of questions the professor asks - names and dates, or thought questions.

31. Use SQ3R - survey the material you are going to read - look it over. What are you going to learn about? Are there questions in the book at the beginning? Then read the material. After reading, recite what you have read - in other words, say it aloud to yourself, then review what you have read.

32. Plan ahead for tests, for term papers, for final science projects or labs. Allow plenty of time for each of these activities. Procure a typist or a typewriter for your term paper. Give yourself plenty of time to choose a topic and then to research it. Read the paper out loud before submitting it.

33. Some people study better alone, some seem to do better in a group. You decide your style, but if you see that the study session is turning into a bull session, avoid wasting time in the future.

34. When taking tests, allow plenty of time. Use the process of elimination. Try to be overprepared. Don't change answers unless you can think of two reasons to do so. Some colleges have test taking seminars to prepare people to take tests. Take advantage of these seminars if you are having problems.

35. Don't be discouraged. Many students do not do well the first semester or even the first year, then they "get the hang of it" and begin to find their way around campus. They begin to find an area of interest and begin to learn a great many of the short cuts,

and learn to budget and manage their time. Other students re-assess their priorities and decide that college is not for drinking and partying, but for learning and studying.

36. Be careful of personal problems - too many college students allow personal problems to interfere with their studies. Pregnancy can do a great deal to disrupt a college career. Addiction to drugs can cause a great amount of problems. Alcohol abuse can ruin a good G.P.A. and a lot of potential.

37. Work on your memory skills - many college introductory psychology textbooks have a section on improving your memory. Some students use mnemonics or memory tricks. Back in grade school, you probably learned how to remember the lines and spaces in music - E, G, B, D, F, - Every Good Boy Does Fine. The spaces were F A C E - Face. Some colleges have memory workshops to help those forgetful souls remember better. Your memory can be improved - you simply have to work at it!

Robert Sternberg (1986) has studied college students and has listed some of the reasons why bright people do not do well. Do any of these ring a bell? If so, you may want to take a hard, long look at your weaknesses and possibly even seek out a college counselor for help with these areas. The twenty reasons are:

1. Lack of motivation
2. Lack of impulse control
3. Lack of perseverance and perseveration
4. Using the wrong abilities

5. Inability to translate thought into action

6. Lack of product orientation

7. Inability to complete tasks and follow through

8. Failure to initiate

9. Fear of failure

10. Procrastination

11. Misattribution of blame

12. Excessive self-pity

13. Excessive dependency

14. Wallowing in personal difficulties

15. Distractibility and lack of concentration

16. Spreading oneself too thin or too thick

18. Inability or unwillingness to see the forest from the trees

19. Lack of balance between critical, analytic thinking and creative, synthetic thinking

20. Too little or too much self-confidence (pp. 339-345).

I have also found a few other reasons for college students doing poorly. These are: excessive escapism - too much TV, MTV, or movie watching, a lot of college students spend an inordinate amount of time playing video games or computer games or simply "hacking."

Hyatt and Gottlieb (1987) have a few insights regarding difficulty which I would like to discuss. They cite the "nine most common reasons for failure." While these reasons are primarily about the world of work, they are also relevant to college success and/or failure. The nine reasons are:

1. Poor interpersonal skills
2. "Wrong fit"
3. Lack of committment
4. Bad luck
5. Self-destructive behavior
6. Too scattered to focus
7. Sexism, ageism and racism
8. Poor management - over or under delegation
9. Hanging on (pp. 103-126).

Let me discuss these as they relate to college students.

Poor interpersonal skills can result in a person becoming a loner. Loners become depressed and withdrawn, and fail to study. Another aspect of poor interpersonal skills is the student who always argues with a professor about a grade, an assignment, or a test. While most professors are objective, it does little good to alienate people.

There are instances of "wrong fit." Joe was a student from a very small farm in Nebraska. He relocated to the big city of Chicago to attend school there. Joe never fit in and was unhappy. He returned to his home state and is now doing well.

Lack of committment is similiar to lack of motivation, but there is a slight difference. Bill was not interested in college and went only because his father wanted him to. He was not committed to his education and subsequently flunked out.

Danny was simply a victim of bad luck. His car broke down on the

way to college, he arrived late, then to make matters worse, he got poor academic advising. Certain courses he wanted were closed due to his lateness and he was advised to take certain courses which he probably was poorly equipped to handle. He did his best but ended up on academic probation. After a few semesters, he recovered, but it was difficult for him.

Self-destructive behavior can range from drugs to alcohol to promiscuous sex. Procrastination, failing to attend class, and over-extending are all forms of self-destructive behavior.

"Too scattered to focus" reflects a tendency to get over involved in sports, social events, student government, the dating scene and the like. Too little time is scheduled for study.

Sexism, ageism and racism exist. They should not, but they do. In general, your sex, age, and race should not be a factor in your college career. But there are some people who will either consciously or unconsciously discriminate against you on the basis of your age (too old), your sex (women don't take calculus), or your race (fill in your own example here!).

Poor management - over or underdelegation. Many students do their own typing. They meticulously type and re-type reports and term papers. A lot of time is spent in this typing behavior. That time could better be spent studying. A wise student pays a typist to do their word processing or typing.

On the other hand, don't depend too much on friends to do your work, or run to the library or take notes for you or tutor you. One

football player, a smoldering volcano of virile manhood, asked several girls to help him with various projects. When they began to encounter each other, the game was over and he was on the losing end.

"Hanging on" is a tough one to discuss. Let me use an example. Andy was in his first semester. He was a slow student, but had 3 "C's," 1 "B," and a "D". Andy had to decide whether or not to drop the "D" course. He failed the course and this affected his grade point average. Students must be judicious about knowing when to withdraw from a class and when to "hang in there." A chat with the professor might have helped also.

Summary and Conclusion

There are some very powerful, useful study guides and tips in the preceeding pages. However, they are useless unless you decide to use them. They are tools, which can assist any student in completing their college career.

In conclusion, I would like to offer the following quote attributed to Calvin Coolidge, the 30th President of the United States:

> Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education alone will not, the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.

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